

PREFACE to a DEPT STORE

I was at the Macy's on 34th and Seventh Avenue last month, at exactly 3:47pm on June 2, 2003. I had received an SMS that morning requesting me to assemble there, in the secured lobby area just inside the revolving doors at the Broadway and 34th Street entrance. Once there I was given a thin blue sheet of paper measuring 3x5 inches. On it was hand typed a message:

DIRECTIONS FOR USE: ! EXCHANGE IMMEDIATELY !
1 dollar bill with someone,
drop the dollar bill
on the floor and then
leave as quietly as possible.



What is the “movement of an anecdote” but a blurry exit through a diagram of some missed opportunity? The performance produced 38 U.S. dollars, 4 HK dollars, and 2 Euros. Someone with a stopwatch timed the event at 47 seconds. Outside in the dispersing crowd I met [a woman] who would later become my girlfriend and later my wife. Her name was Clare [Churchouse] at the time. In Singapore at the Golden Locket Hotel, exactly the same thing was happening 6 months and one hour later. As I left the airport and later the hotel lobby and Macy's one month later, I kept thinking I was watching a painting or a movie theatre at the moment it started becoming something else. I have tried to remember this incident many times but the same image constantly assails me and I am no longer able to remember the date/time of the event or the age/size of my girlfriend/wife. I realize now that I have met her many times at many similar moments. Who is she? What is she doing at the moment I see her face? She is turning away and telling me that my project is “flawed.” My wife's *Manhattan Diary* for 2/21/01 reads: “met author at Bulgarian Bar on Canal Street.” She wrote that after the fact. This book is dedicated to her in that crowd where I do not see her. We were married on November 7, 2002, at City Hall in New York City.

Like shopping malls and other enclosures, consciousness is merely a generic mode of duration or thinking "without preconditions." Like everything else, consciousness is in need of micro-branding and rehearsal. Enjoyment is one of the most difficult emotions to predict, and the ideal movie or building or poem should be extremely predictable and convey as little information as possible. The kind of group thinking that takes place when shopping, voting or reading lacks functionality. In the informal, non-mob sequence at Macy's, a purposeless film within a film within a department store, the population center is micro-branded and meaninglessly re-enacted [one of the forms of convergence] in order to be dispersed or delivered like a logo. The logo is an anonymous murmur. MF said that.

We believe expenditure takes place without meaningful exchange, or we get repetitive gestures without significance. Airports, shopping malls, and golf courses are the most pleasing, crisis-free, and logo-ized of landscapes. They are mood-inducing delivery systems, schematas of unimposed identifications that make irrelevant the distinction between pre- and post-consumption. A golf course like a painting is consumed in almost the same way time and time again. That is why golf is so relaxing. Golf courses, cineplexes and shopping centers fringe population areas and function in the same way that pastoral poetry, the coffee house c. 1680, short bandwidth radio, or the only movie theatre in a small town once did. They remind us that we need to fall in love again and again and again with something that is unspecific, very repetitive, and very very general. The lights of the Varsity Movie Theatre in Athens, Ohio, where I grew up, reflect each night off the bricks of Court Street, but the marquee now reads Taco Bell, and the old balcony and stage are now the site of tables and the gentle, illuminated prices of tacos and quesadillas. Our most beautiful emotions like a movie theatre or the pages of a Chinese cookbook or the price of 16 ounces of Pepsi are routine and anodyne. Either they existed before or they existed previously. All of our emotions vacation with incandescence as they dissolve.